

Military culture and the culture of Warriors



From Vietnam to Afghanistan

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(US Army Ret)

A close-up, vertical view of the American flag, showing the blue field with white stars and the red and white stripes. The flag is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Objectives

- Become familiar with Military Culture and the character of warriors...
- Understand the sources of stress for soldiers
- Understand informal sources of support, during deployments and upon return to home.
 - Transitioning into combat– Developing the warrior mindset.
 - Transitioning out of combat and back to the real world.
- Why we need to learn and understand.

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Understanding Military Culture become familiar with

- Common military terms and demographics
- The transition into and out of combat
- Stressors in the military
- The informal support mechanisms for service personnel.
- The implications of military culture for clinicians

Understanding Military Culture

Key to establishing trust



Combat veterans believe:

“The only people who understand me are other combat veterans.”

A vertical strip of the American flag is visible on the left side of the slide, showing the stars and stripes.

What is the Military?

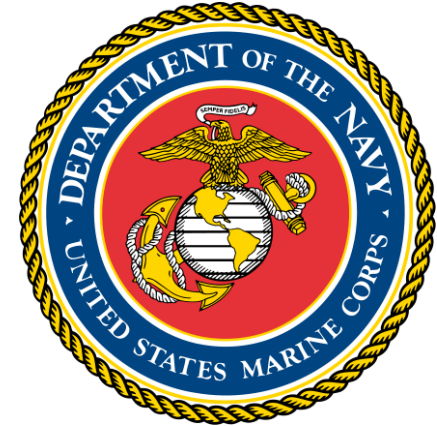
Starts with civilian control

- National Command Authority = The President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Combatant Commander.
- Department of Defense (DOD) = The Secretary of Defense and all military services less the Coast Guard.
- Department of Homeland Security. Includes the US Coast Guard.

What is the military?



- Army
- Navy
- Marine Corps
- Air Force
- Coast Guard*



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Military Culture

- High standard of discipline helps organize and structure the armed forces.
- Professional ethos of loyalty and self-sacrifice provides structure during battle.
- Distinct set of ceremony and etiquette creates shared rituals and common identities.
- Emphasis on group cohesion & esprit de corps connects service members to each other.
- ***The individual is secondary to the unit.***

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Military Culture

“Compared to war, all other forms of human endeavor shrink to insignificance.” G. Patton

- For most veterans, their service and particularly their war experience will be the biggest events of their lives.

Military Culture

How to address a service person. By service or by rank and name?

-  Army = soldier,
-  Navy = Sailor,
-  Marine Corps = Marine,
-  Air Force = Airman,
-  Coast Guard = Coast Guardsman.
- Service personnel are generally not over-sensitive about being confused with a sister service -by civilians.
- However there are friendly rivalries between services.

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How to address a soldier

“Good morning, Sergeant Smith”

- Most service personnel understand that civilians don't know their rank.
- Best solution is to just ask – “how they would like to be addressed.”
- Reserve/active share same bonds and combat experiences.
- If you are near a base, get a rank-chart for the service that use the base. (Available on the internet)

Military Culture

- Examples of Military Rank Charts. Available on the internet.

Navy

Pay Grade	Rate	Abbreviation	Upper Sleeve	Collar and Cap
E-1	Seaman Recruit	SR	none	none
E-2	Seaman Apprentice	SA		none
E-3	Seaman	SN		none
E-4	Petty Officer Third Class	PO3		
E-5	Petty Officer Second Class	PO2		
E-6	Petty Officer First Class	PO1		
E-7	Chief Petty Officer	CPO		
E-8	Senior Chief Petty Officer	SCPO		
E-9	Master Chief Petty Officer	MCPO		

Marines



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Military Language

“the valley of the acronym”

- Military jargon distinguishes from civilians.
- Military Jargon - A language only the group understands.
- Often heavily laced with selected profanity.
- Military language is a unique part of the fabric that binds military units together.
- It is often service specific and ALWAYS evolving.

A vertical image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes, positioned on the left side of the slide.

Military Culture

Military speak: always changing

- **Some common acronyms and terms**
 - **OEF or OIF** = Operational acronyms for Afghanistan or Iraq
 - **Nam** = Vietnam
 - **DOD** = Dept. of Defense
 - **Branch** = Army, Marine Corps, Navy etc.
 - **Unit** = Platoon, Company, Battalion, etc.
 - **IED** = Improvised Explosive Device
 - **VBIED** = Vehicle Born IED (car bomb)
 - **RPG** = Rocket Propelled Grenade
 - **MOS** = Military Occupation Specialty/job
 - **FOB** = Forward Operating Base



Military Culture

Military speak: includes slang

- **Grunt** = infantryman
- **In-theater** = in a war-zone
- **Outside the wire** = off the base – danger zone
- **Bird** = chopper = helicopter
- **Battle-rattle** = **TA-50** = **IBA** = Personal combat gear
- **Targeted** (for engagement) – Contemporary use as a non-lethal term meaning to give special attention or focus. *“My wife is on my target list.”*
- **Jody** = Civilian back home who is “seeing” your wife or girlfriend.
- **Haji** = Can be a term of respect referring to someone who has made the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. But usually, a catch-all term for Arabs, or Islamic people. May be used as a demeaning name.
- **Hooah** = Can mean just about anything except “no.” Usually means approval or acknowledgement.

Military Culture

24 hr. Military Time

\$13 clocks available online from large e-stores
Simple fix – buy one and put one in your office

2209 or
1009



add 1200
after noon

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The Range of Veterans WWII -- Afghanistan

- Current Vet population range ages from 18-90s
- While current focus is on veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Other vets may present: including WWII, Korea, and a large Vietnam veteran population.
- Vietnam and SW Asia are the largest living populations

Range of Veterans

Vietnam



- Vietnam: Draft military – War fought by sons of WWII vets. Very “kinetic” war – many casualties.
- Draft Army – very different culture than today.

Military Culture

- Iraq/Afghanistan fought by an all volunteer force...in large part by sons and daughters of non-vets..



- Though less casualties in current wars, the stresses may be greater.

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For those exposed, killing and death are great stressors

- Frontline troops often come up with slang to dehumanize the enemy – someone they have killed, the *untermensch*.
- Slang often substituted for the act of killing – i.e. Zapped, Greased, Took him out, etc.
- Killing while remaining politically correct.
- Shootings investigated after the fact. “15-6”
- Gallows humor often prevalent among soldiers exposed to death and killing for long periods.



Going to War – a mental transition

“Halfway down the trail to hell”

- Vietnam culture included beer, gambling, and “Playboy” magazines. Investigations rare.
- Contemporary military culture shaped in part by General Order Number 1. No Booze, no sex, no gambling, etc. Investigations, searches common.
- Vietnam, *Accidental discharge* vs. Iraq, *Negligent discharge*.

A close-up, vertical view of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The flag is positioned on the left side of the slide, with the stars in the upper left and the stripes extending downwards.

Military Culture

Sources of stress

- Leaving family, children, girl/boy friend.
- Stress of climate/diet/living arrangements.
- Stress of living in crowded, confined, highly structured environment.
- Stress of combat. Personal danger, danger to others, Danger of accidents.
- Difficult to determine who is the enemy. Who is the threat? Who are your friends?



Causes of Stress

IEDs: Improvised Explosive Devices



“A man may take a chance and survive, but no man can survive a thousand chances.” Erich Remarque

Basic Training: Military Culture





Causes of stress

IEDs: Injury to self, buddies



Causes of Stress

Injury-death – self and buddies



Causes of stress


Injured civilians/children



Causes of Stress


Loss of friends, leaders



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Direct combat exposure, not the only source of severe stress in a war-zone

- Extreme physical demands
- Tedium, boredom, looong hours
- Every day is groundhog day
- Lack of control over your own life

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Direct combat exposure not the only source of severe stress in a war-zone

- No sense of accomplishment
- Worry about family back home
- Inability to “fix” things at home
- Poor and crowded living conditions
- Dangerous working conditions, Accidents

Informal Support

Small unit = The military family

Bands of Brothers (and sisters)




More sources of stress

Connectivity – internet, telephone

- ***“I hate to call home and learn something’s broken and not be able to do anything about it.”***



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Life on the FOB

(Forward Operating Base)

Amazing number/quality of facilities available, but

- The sense of confinement likened to “being in a medium security prison.”
- 24X7 regimentation of dress and activity.
- Monotonous, Every day is ground hog day. Same events, same food, same people.

The unit = surrogate family
The small unit acts as a family



FOB = Forward Operating Base

FOB Life




“Living here is like being in a medium-security prison”

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Length of Combat Tours Vary

- Combat tours range from 3 to 14 months depending on branch of service.
- “I’ve had three tours” could mean a total of more than three years OR it could be as little as nine months in a combat zone.
- Getting home for family emergencies difficult
- Preparations to return home build stress.

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Coming home from combat

Rejoining the sane

- Looking forward to the happy fantasy
- Briefings, Briefings, Briefings – “another don’t go home and kill your wife briefing”
- Reverse separation anxiety – weapon, unit, buddies
- Leaving native people/friends... “I made promises, will they be OK when I’ve gone home.”

Military Culture

Sources of Stress

- Return from deployment (fantasy vs. reality)
- Family reunion – huge readjustment for many
- Trading families again – Military for Civilian



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Redeployment anxiety

A state of transition

- Missing that sense of belonging
- Separation anxiety – weapon, unit, buddies
- Sense of things undone
- Rationalizing what you have done. Need to validate acts of war.

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Military Culture

Post deployment

- Readjusting self to a sane world.
- Units (surrogate family) are often broken or reorganized. Members sent to other bases.
- Reassignments
- Deferred medical catch-up.
- **“The only people who really understand are those that were with me in combat.”** Talking with buddies helps ease back into normal society. A form of informal group therapy.



Suggestions for start points

Questions you can ask

1. Have you or anyone in your family been in the military?
2. Where were you assigned?
3. What unit were you in?
4. (When were you there?)

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Conclusions

- Large and growing number of veterans
- *“There is no avoiding war; it can only be postponed to the advantage of others.”* Machiavelli
- Needs for your services will grow
- You are key to keeping our service personnel healthy...
- How? Learn the language – understand the culture –
- ***Earn their trust – become part of the family.***

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Battle Handover

- Next month, I'll be followed by LCDR Erin Simmons who will present her

“Rules of Thumb for Successful Deployment Reunions”

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